

# *Dance Index*

*a new magazine devoted to dancing*





*Mad<sup>e</sup> Lucien Petipa and Mons<sup>ieur</sup> Grisi*

Grisi and Lucien Petipa in *The Peri* (Coralli-Burgmüller)

Lithograph by C. G. and J. H. Lynch, London, 1843

Harvard Theatre Collection

This pose has a remarkable resemblance to that which concludes the adagio of the "Blue Bird" pas de deux in Marius Petipa's *La Belle au Bois Dormant*.

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*Editors*

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## *Comment*

Although Marius Petipa long has been acknowledged as the link between the romantic French ballet and the Russian ballet of the twentieth century, little is known of his background or family. His father, Jean, was a distinguished dancer, choreographer, and teacher. His brother, Lucien, enjoyed a long career as premier danseur and ballet master at the Paris Opera, exercising a great influence on theatrical dancing of his time. His wife, Marie Surovshikova, was one of the first Russian dancers to perform in western Europe, and his best known daughter, Marie Mariusovna, danced character roles in St. Petersburg for many years, as one of the principal interpreters of her father's ballets. Here she was seen by Alexander Benois, a collaborator of the Diaghilev Ballet. When she was over fifty, and long after her official retirement from the stage, she accepted the invitation of Michel Fokine to appear in one of his early ballets, a Harlequinade produced for a charity performance in 1908, which Fokine later expanded into *Carnaval*.

It cannot be pretended that the most important part of the Petipa careers occurred in America, nor were they actually the first distinguished French dancers to appear here. Mme. Celeste and Mme. Augusta of Paris as well as Mme. Lecomte and Mlle. Bernardin of Brussels, and the Paul Taglionis, too, had immediately preceded them. However, Lillian Moore's unique notes do chronicle their American visit and most of their careers in western Europe. Miss Moore is already the author of *Artists of the Dance*. In addition to being a soloist with the Metropolitan Opera Ballet for a number of seasons, she has danced leading roles on many North American stages.

During the century between the debut of Jean Petipa and the retirement of his granddaughter Marie Mariusovna, the influence of the Petipa family penetrated deeply into the traditions of ballet in France and Russia, and even extended to America. Almost everywhere this influence is still felt.

Cover: *Mars Desarmée par Venus*. Jacques Louis David. 1824

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# *The Petipa Family* *in Europe and America*

by LILLIAN MOORE

Jean Petipa, father of the great choreographer of the Russian Ballet, was born in 1787. His name first enters theatrical history in the year 1815, when he was *premier danseur* at the Théâtre de la Porte Saint-Martin, in Paris. The maître de ballet of this house was Jean-Baptiste Blache, a famous choreographer who had produced at the Paris Opera, in Bordeaux, Marseilles, and other French cities. It is probable that Blache trained Jean Petipa.

In September, 1815, the ballet company of the Porte Saint-Martin gave a series of twenty guest performances at the Monnaie, in Brussels. The principal dancers were Messieurs Petipa, Rhenon, and Pierson, and Mesdames Pierson, Darcourt, and Marinette. This was Jean Petipa's first appearance at the theatre with which he was to be associated for more than twenty years. At the close of their short engagement, the little troupe returned to Paris for their first season under the Restoration.

At about this time Jean married a young actress, who bore him three sons and a daughter. Of Ivan, little is known. The daughter became an opera singer. Lucien was born in Marseilles in 1816, and Marius, the greatest of his family, was born in the same city on March 11, 1819.

In the meantime, the Monnaie decided to form a permanent corps de ballet. In 1816 its directors

engaged several dancers, and the following year they added a staff ballet-master, Eugene Hus, who had danced at the Paris Opera thirty years earlier. In 1819 a new director, Bernard, took charge of the affairs of the theatre. Retaining Hus, he decided to secure new dancers. He selected Mlle. Marie Lesueur, a nineteen-year-old Parisian girl, as *première*, Jean Petipa as *premier danseur*, and a Monsieur Desplaces as *deuxième danseur*. Madame Petipa was engaged as *jeune première* among the actresses. The corps de ballet at the Monnaie consisted, at this time, of ten *sujets*, or soloists, and an ensemble of twelve *danseuses*, twelve *danseurs*, and twelve children.

The three new dancers, Petipa, Desplaces, and Mlle. Lesueur, made their debuts together on May 20, 1819, in Blache's ballet *Almaviva et Rosine*, a reworking of Beaumarchais, which was used by Mozart as well as by Paisello and Rossini. A few days later, the entire company moved to a magnificent new building which had just been completed. A gala was given to celebrate its opening, and on this occasion Petipa presented his first choreographic composition, a *divertissement* interpolated in Grétry's opera *La Caravane du Caire*. It won enthusiastic praise from the critics, and Petipa's position was assured.

The ballet repertoire at the Monnaie consisted mainly of classics, by Blache, Milon, Aumer, and Gardel, which had already been presented at Parisian theatres, and which Hus re-adapted for the Monnaie. Although engaged chiefly as dancer, Petipa soon became Hus's assistant, producing as many ballets as his master. On September 1, 1819, Petipa presented his first complete ballet, a production in one act, called *La Kermesse*, based on the National Flemish Carnival which indicated aspirations for Belgian independence.

On June 17, 1821, Petipa produced a work of major importance, the two-act ballet *La Naissance de Venus et de l'Amour*. Mlle. Lesueur danced the role of Venus, and little Lucien Petipa, then but five years old, took the part of Amour.

The celebrated painter Jacques Louis David was at that time a resident of Brussels. An ardent revolutionary and supporter of Napoleon, whom he painted several times, he had been exiled from France after Waterloo and the restoration of the Bourbons. David was very fond of the ballet, and with good reason. When he was a struggling young artist he had been engaged to assist Fragonard in painting the frescoes for the new house of the great dancer Marie Madeleine Guimard (1743-1816). She became interested in his work, and it is said that she paid for his studies before he won the Prix de Rome.

During his old age David, not forgetting the days when he costumed Talma, often attended the performances at the Monnaie. He lived very close to the theatre, and went so frequently that he had a certain seat always reserved. If for any reason he was absent or late, and someone else took that particular chair, a neighbor would politely inform the intruder it was especially reserved for M. David, and must remain empty unless he came.

He must have seen Jean Petipa dance often. At any rate, he was so deeply impressed by the ballet *La Naissance de Venus* that it inspired him to paint the picture *Mars Desarmé par Venus*,\* which hung in the Brussels Musée Ancien until the beginning of the present war. Mlle. Lesueur served as model for the figure of Venus, but a little servant girl posed for the feet of the goddess, as those of the hard-working ballerina were not sufficiently beautiful to please the painter. Young

Lucien Petipa, a strikingly handsome child, posed for Amour. A subscriber of the Monnaie was Mars, while the central figure of the Three Graces was Mlle. Philippon, a dancer who had won the favor of the Prince of Orange. According to a letter written by David to the tenor Defosse, even Mars' helmet was a property of the theatre.

Although David probably began his picture shortly after the first production of the ballet in 1821, he did not complete it until three years later, for it bears the date 1824. David took particular pains with his Venus. In his original version the goddess faced front, but later he repainted the whole figure. As soon as the picture was finished, it was exhibited in Brussels for the benefit of the Old People's Home, and then shown in Paris, where it attracted considerable attention and brought the painter a profit of 45,000 francs. When David died in the following year, at the age of seventy-seven, *Mars Desarmé par Venus* passed to his son, and then to the City of Brussels.

In the meantime a new dancer, M. Benoni, made his debut at the Théâtre de la Monnaie on July 10, 1821, in *Les Jeux d'Eglé*. A *premier danseur*, he ranked below Jean Petipa. Remaining at the Monnaie for six seasons, he took leading roles in most of the productions. In 1823 he married Mlle. Feltmann, a *troisième danseuse* (who eventually replaced Mlle. Lesueur as *première*).

On February 24, 1822, Petipa produced *Monsieur Deschahumaux*, an ambitious ballet in three acts, adapted from the work by Creuze, Lesser and Gaveaux. Eugene Hus died in the same year, and Petipa became the official director of the ballet. At this time gas illumination was introduced.

The opening of the new season saw many changes in the company. Madame Petipa retired from the stage, and Mlle. Adeline, a promising young dancer who had been a soloist since 1819, was promoted to rank with Mlle. Lesueur as *première*. Petipa showed his progressive spirit by engaging many guest artists for individual performances. During 1823 M. Aniel, *premier danseur* of the Grand Théâtre of Bordeaux, M. Laurençon, *danseur comique*, and the celebrated Auguste Vestris made special appearances in Brussels. In 1824 Petipa continued this policy by engaging M. Télémaque, of the Porte Saint-Martin, to appear as Alexis in *Le Déserteur*, a famous old ballet by Dauberval. During 1823 and 1824 Petipa produced eleven new works by Gardel, Dauberval and Blache, but nothing of his own. In 1825, however, he

\* This picture is ten feet and a quarter by eight and three quarters.



Lithograph by Ferdinand Daems, Brussels, Ca. 1835  
Harvard Theatre Collection

created two ballets: *Frisac, ou la Double Noce*, on February 13th, and *Le Cinq Juillet*, on July 9th. The music for both was composed by Joseph François Snel (1793-1861), a member of the staff of the Monnaie, with whom Petipa often collaborated.

Meanwhile the *première danseuse*, Mlle. Lesueur, had been the victim of a tragic accident. In January, 1825, during the general rehearsal of Blache's *Jenny, ou Le Mariage Secret*, she fell through a trap-door, narrowly escaping death. Although seriously injured, she forced herself to perform the next day. (The strain was too much, and she was obliged to rest for six weeks. On her re-appearance she danced so badly that she was hissed.) After struggling in vain against failing health, she finally retired and married M. van Gobbelschroy, minister of the Interior under King William I.

In 1825 the corps de ballet was slightly enlarged, to include sixteen men, sixteen women, eight chil-

dren, and six pupils, who occasionally appeared. The following season Petipa organized a regular conservatory of dancing, composed of twenty-four pupils. Lessons were given four times each week, and a yearly examination determined which pupils were qualified for the corps de ballet. It was in this school that Marius and Lucien, then aged seven and ten respectively, received their fine training.

Jean Petipa retired from the stage at this time, and was replaced by Benoni as *premier mime*, and Ragaine as *premier danseur*. Ragaine made his debut on May 11, 1826. In July and August a distinguished guest artist, Mme. Paul Montessu, *première danseuse* of the Paris Opera, made twelve appearances. For the last three she was joined by her husband. Petipa produced three ballets in 1826. *Monsieur de Porcaugnac*, with choreography by himself and music by Snel, had its premiere on February 5th. The story was probably taken from Molière's play. On April 3rd he gave Deshayes'\* ballet *Zemir et Azor*, which was danced to music by Schneitzhoeffter, future composer of Taglioni's *La Sylphide*, and on December 14th he presented *Jocko, le Singe de Brésil*. This last ballet had already been created by Philippe Taglioni for his daughter Marie, but although Petipa, in Brussels, followed the same subject, he created his own choreography. On October 26, 1826, a memorial program called *Hommage à Talma* was given at the Monnaie in honor of the great tragedian, who had just died. Petipa arranged a special ballet *divertissement* for this performance.

In 1827 Petipa produced two ballets by Aumer, with music by Hérold: *Astolphe et Joconde*, and *La Somnambule*. Both of them had recently been created at the Paris Opera. On February 22nd, he presented *Gulliver*, an adaptation of Swift's satire after the original by Coralli. During 1827 young Marius Petipa, aged eight, made his debut. None of its details are known. Perhaps he was a Lilliputian in *Gulliver*!

Jean Petipa was intent on making the ballet of the Théâtre de la Monnaie one of the finest in Europe. He was gradually strengthening his personnel, and in 1827 two new *premiers danseurs*, Leblond and Lasserre, and three new *premières*, Mmes. Martin and Leblond, and Mlle. Leroux, made their debuts. The last-named was probably the Pauline Leroux who later won distinction at the Paris Opera. M. Lasserre made his debut in an

\* Deshayes and Perrot staged *Giselle* in London in 1842.

old classic, *La Fille Mal Gardée*, which is still in the repertoires of the Ballet Theatre and the Soviet ballet. Among the guest artists who appeared were Mlles. Maria, Perceval, and Mimi Dupuis, all from the Paris Opera, and the superb mime and character dancer Mazurier, who made a sensational success as Jocko, the Brazilian ape. This promising young artist died while he was still in his twenties.

In the same year a serious scandal upset the discipline of the ballet at the Monnaie. M. and Mme. Leblond accused the comic dancer Laurençon of the theft of 350 florins, declaring that he had robbed them in the foyer of the theatre itself, possibly during a rehearsal. Laurençon was arrested and condemned to a year in prison, but he appealed the case and was released. On his reappearance in *Deux bailles, ou les vendangeurs*, (Two baskets, or the vintagers) there was such an uproar of applause mingled with hisses and cat-calls that the police had to order the lowering of the curtain. The audience still refused to be quieted, and the commotion went on for fifteen minutes before people dispersed to continue the brawl at the well known Cafe *Au Doux*. After this unfortunate evening Laurençon was forced to leave Brussels. He was replaced by Girel, who made his debut in *Les Meuniers*, and later produced ballets of his own.

On February 18, 1828, Jean Petipa presented one of his most successful compositions, in seven scenes, called *Les Petites Danaïdes*. The music was, as usual, by Snel. This was followed on August 7th by a revival of *La Naissance de Venus et de l'Amour*, in which Marius probably inherited his brother's role.

On August 2, 1830, Mme. Lecomte, who was later to bring Jean and Marius Petipa to America, made her debut as *première danseuse* in Sor's ballet *Cendrillon*. It was a troubled debut, for the Belgian national revolt was brewing.

Since the downfall of Napoleon and the Treaty of Vienna, in 1815, Belgium and Holland had been united under the rule of William I of Orange. It was an arrangement which did not in the least suit the liberty-loving Belgians. For some time discontent had been growing, and it was a performance at the Monnaie which marked the beginning of the Revolution.

On August 25, 1830, Auber's opera-ballet *La Muette de Portici* was presented, with Madame Benoni in the role of the dumb girl, Fenella. The story of *La Muette* is based upon historical fact, and deals with the uprising of the Neapolitans

against their ruler, Alfonso, during the seventeenth century. It contains many inciting passages, and to oppressed Brussels it provided the spark which inflamed them to rebellion. During the third act, when Masaniello, leader of the Neapolitan people, shouted "To arms!", the audience rose en masse, re-echoing his cry. It was impossible to complete the performance. Screaming hysterically, the public poured out into the public square, where they were joined by a restless waiting throng unable to get into the theatre. Rioting broke out, the royal guard was attacked, and it retired, without resistance, to the Palace.

Next day a citizens' committee took over the government of Brussels. William I, not realizing the seriousness of the situation, sent his son, the Prince of Orange, to parley with the rebels. All attempts at negotiation failed, and fighting broke out all over Belgium, while volunteers poured into the capital to join the revolutionaries.

Meanwhile the theatre was closed for several weeks. Re-opening on September 12th, it struggled through a week of performances given under the most difficult conditions; after the 19th, it was closed for good. The troops of Prince Frederic, William's second son, were approaching the city. They entered Brussels on September 23rd, but after three days of barricades the revolutionaries drove them out. On October 4th the provisional government in Brussels proclaimed the nation's independence.

While the fighting continued for some time, the revolutionary forces were eventually victorious, and in November the Monnaie was re-opened. Petipa and his collaborator Snel celebrated the victory by the production, in January 1831, of a patriotic ballet bearing the odd title *Le 23, 24, 25 et 26 septembre*. It commemorated the battle of Brussels, which had taken place during those days. The Monnaie's part in the outbreak of the revolution was further signalized by the striking of a medal, bearing on one side a picture of the theatre and the words *Muette de Portici, Bruxelles, XXV Aout MDCCCXXX*, and on the other a representation of a lion with the Belgian flag, and the words *Courage et Force, Independance, Revolution Belge 1830*.

At the end of the season, in July 1831, Jean Petipa left the Monnaie. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for his departure. Although unlikely, in view of his patriotic productions, it is possible he was actually sympathetic to the Loyalist

cause. His former *première danseuse*, Mlle. Lesueur, was married to one of the Ministers of William I, and Petipa's important position in an endowed theatre had brought him into close contact with court officials. A newcomer, M. Laffilè, assumed the directorship of the Monnaie in August, and perhaps he had his own reasons for changing ballet masters. At any rate, Petipa spent the next two years wandering through the provincial theatres of France, producing ballets in Lyon, Marseilles, and Bordeaux. His post in Brussels was taken over by M. Bartholomin, an ambitious young man who had joined the corps de ballet in 1824 as a *coryphé*, and gradually worked himself up to the post of assistant ballet master.\*

In 1833 Jean Petipa returned to the Monnaie, where he shared with Bartholomin the post of maître de ballet, occasionally appearing on the stage in mimed rôles, but producing no more ballets. In 1835 he returned to Bordeaux, where his work, especially *Les Petites Danaïdes*, enjoyed tremendous popularity.

During the period which followed, Petipa devoted much of his time and energy to the development of his sons, now old enough to be thinking about careers of their own. Marius made his professional debut — if one excepts those early appearances in Brussels — at the Comédie Française in 1838, when he danced a *pas de deux* with Carlotta Grisi at a performance given for the benefit of Mlle. Rachel. Soon after, he was engaged as *premier danseur* at Nantes where he choreographed *Le Droit du Seigneur*, *La Petite Bohémienne*, *La Noce à Nantes*. Lucien's even more auspicious debut was made at the Paris Opera on June 10, 1839.

In the summer of 1839 Jean Petipa's former *première* at Brussels, Mme. Lecomte, invited Jean and Marius Petipa to come to the United States, as ballet master and *premier danseur* of a ballet company she was organizing in New York. Mme. Lecomte had already danced in the United States for two seasons, and her success had been so encouraging that now she decided to bring over several European dancers. Her husband, a tenor who also appeared at the Monnaie, had retired from

the stage to become her manager.

The Petipas sailed from London September 2, on the *British Queen*. They arrived in New York eighteen days later, just in time to witness the last performances of Paul and Amelie Taglioni, who were completing a four-months tour of Baltimore, Philadelphia, Boston and Providence as well as New York. Their farewell performance, a benefit for Madame Taglioni, took place on September 24th. In all probability Marius and Jean Petipa were in the audience at the Park Theatre to watch *Nathalie, la Laitière Suisse*, and the second act of *La Sylphide*. The Taglionis went back to Europe on the return trip of the *British Queen*, sailing a few days later.

At this time Marius Petipa was barely twenty. During his recent engagement at Nantes he had stumbled during a performance, and broken his leg. In America he made his first appearance on the stage after an absence of many weeks. It is probable that his leg still bothered him, for although he had been engaged as *premier danseur*, Mme. Lecomte's brother, Jules Martin, seems to have danced most of the leading rôles, while Marius was relegated to pantomimic parts. This broken leg may even explain why Marius never became as fine a classic dancer as his brother Lucien.

The month of October was spent in rehearsals. Just before the company was ready to open, the theatre at which they had contracted to appear was burned down. J. W. Wallack, the manager, hurriedly engaged another house, the National Theatre on Broadway, adjoining Niblo's Gardens.

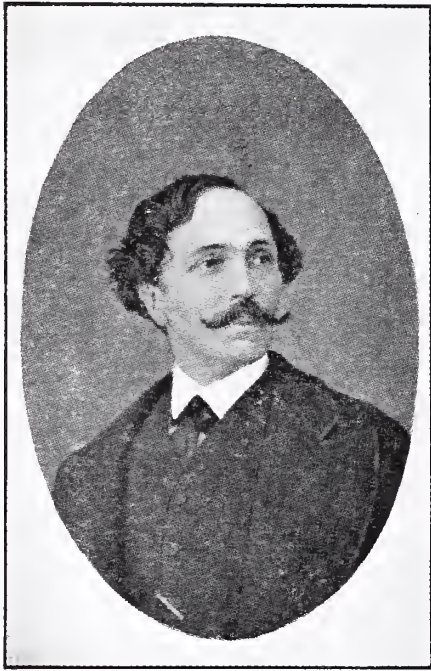
The first performance took place on October 29, 1839. The ballet was *La Tarantule*, which had been presented at the Paris Opera on June 24th of the same year, with music by Casimir Gide and choreography by Jean Coralli. The American program credited Coralli with the story (actually supplied, anonymously, by Scribe), but added: "The Dances arranged and the action of the piece produced under the direction of M. Petipa (sic), Ballet Director from the principal theatres of Paris, Naples, Vienna, Brussels, etc." \* Seven months later Fanny Elssler, who had danced the leading rôle in *La Tarantule* at its Paris première, selected it as the vehicle for her American debut.

\* Some years later Bartholomin visited the United States as ballet master and mime of the Monplaisir Ballet Company, which made its first appearance at the Broadway Theatre, New York, on October 21, 1847, in *L'Alceste*. Bartholomin remained in America for a year, directing the Monplaisir productions of *La Jeune Dalmatie*, *La Follie d'un Peintre*, *Les Deux Roses*, *Azclia*, and *Le Diable à Quatre*.

\* If Jean Petipa produced ballets in Paris, it must have been at one of the minor theatres. He was never choreographer at the Paris Opera or at any of the other important theatres of which we have record. During the periods when his long service at the Monnaie was interrupted, however (1831-33 and 1835-39), we have record of his work in Lyon, Marseilles and Bordeaux.







Marius Petipa, 1855; 1909

Théâtre de la Renaissance, in Paris, on August 23, 1839, a few days before the Petipas sailed for America. The choreographer was M. Ragaine, who had been *premier danseur* at Brussels under Jean Petipa. It is probable that M. Lecomte and the Petipas saw this production before their departure.

The story of *Marco Bomba*, laid in Galicia, concerns the unsuccessful (and not too serious) attempts of a group of village lads to escape conscription into the army. After his return to Brussels in 1843 Jean produced this ballet with considerable success, and much later, in 1878, it appeared in the repertoire of the Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg, when Marius was at the height of his career as virtual dictator of the Russian ballet.

At the Bowery, however, it was given only three times. This engagement also proved a financial failure. On November 23rd the company made a gallant effort to close the season with a flourish, presenting on that evening, for the benefit of Mme. Lecomte, both *Marco Bomba* and a very special "Grand Carnival and Masked Ball, arranged and

produced by Monsieur Petipa."

By this time Jean and Marius Petipa, accustomed to State-endowed theatres, were thoroughly disgusted with the lack of success which had attended their efforts. According to L. I. Leshkov, the Soviet biographer of Marius Petipa, M. Lecomte did not pay what he had promised. At any rate, they took the first opportunity to board a sailing vessel bound for France. Neither ever returned to America.

The Lecomte troupe, incidentally, did not disband when its ballet master and *premier danseur* deserted it. During the winter of 1839-40 the company travelled to the Western islands of Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis, and, oddly enough, won triumphant successes (in Jean Petipa's ballets) wherever they appeared. Later Jules Martin danced for a time as the partner of Fanny Ellsler, during her American tour. Both Mme. Lecomte and her brother became permanent residents of the United States, and finally settled down to teach dancing in Philadelphia.

On his return to Europe, Marius Petipa went to Bordeaux as *premier danseur*. There he created four ballets, *La Jolie Bordelaise*, *L'Intrigue Amoureuse*, *La Vendage*, *La Langage des Fleurs*. After dancing and producing in Spain for four years, as the partner of Madame Guy-Stephan, he joined his father in St. Petersburg in 1847. He remained in the service of the Russian Imperial Theatres for fifty-eight years, a living link between the early romantic ballet and the Diaghilev Ballet which first appeared in Paris in 1909. Marius lived to see the European triumphs of the Russian school he had developed through so many years. He died in St. Petersburg in 1910.

On his return from the United States Jean went back to his former post as ballet master at the Monnaie. His rival Bartholomin was gone, and his reign was undisputed. In Brussels Petipa continued to produce the most popular ballets in the repertoire of the Paris Opera, shortly after their Paris premieres. During the season of 1841-42, he mounted Coralli's masterpieces, *La Tarantule* and *Giselle*.

Petipa remained in Brussels for three more years. In 1843 he invited Fanny Elssler to give a series of guest performances in Brussels. She made her debut on May 31st, and during the next month danced all her most popular roles: *La Tarantule*, *La Sylphide*, *Nathalie*, *la Laitière Suisse*, *Giselle*, and *Le Dieu et la Bayadère*. She gave one performance for the benefit of the blind and incurable of Brussels, and another for the benefit of the local corps de ballet.

During the following season Jean Petipa produced no less than fourteen ballets! The climax of an exciting year came in April, when Fanny Cerrito appeared as guest for a fortnight. She danced *La Sylphide*, *L'Elève d'Amour*, *La Somnambule*, *La Gitana*, *Giselle*, and a divertissement, *La Lithuanienne*.

The year 1844 concluded Jean Petipa's reign in Brussels, for shortly afterwards he accepted a post as professor at the Imperial Academy of Dancing in St. Petersburg. He taught in Russia for many years, but with the exception of *Paquita* and *Le Diable Amoureux*, which he staged for Andreyanova in Moscow in 1847, he actually produced no ballets there. In his classes at the Imperial School he developed many fine Russian dancers, whose talents Marius utilized with such success some years later. Jean Petipa died in St. Petersburg in 1855, at the age of sixty-eight.

Lucien, eldest son of Jean Petipa, was at one time even more famous than his brother Marius. For many years he was *premier danseur* and ballet master of the Paris Opera. Although he was a better dancer, he lacked the creative faculty which distinguished the work of his brother. Today he is almost forgotten because he appeared at a time when the ballerina was all-important, and male dancers were given little opportunity to distinguish themselves.

Born in Marseilles in 1816, Lucien spent his childhood with his parents in Brussels. After several years in the provincial theatres of France, he made his debut at the Paris Opera on June 10, 1839, in the role of Donald in *La Sylphide*. His partner was the lovely Dane, Lucille Grahn. Petipa's success was immediate, and he won a secure and permanent place for himself at the Opera. Théophile Gautier, the poet who wrote the book for *Giselle*, declared that there were only two male dancers at the Opera worth watching, Lucien Petipa and Auguste Mabile.

Charles Herve's *The Theaters of Paris*, published in 1844, said of Lucien: ". . . He is remarkably active, and dances with more ease and grace than any of his comrades. . ." It was further noted that he was unusually handsome, although he sometimes compromised his good looks by baring his teeth in a forced grin while he was dancing. Later he conquered this mannerism, and became a fine mime.

It was Lucien who created the role of Albrecht in *Giselle*. After the first performance, June 28, 1841, Gautier wrote: "Petipa was gracious, passionate, and touching. It is a long time since a *danscur* has given so much pleasure or been so well received."\* "Petipa also merits great eulogies," commented another critic, "He is a *danscur* whom one can watch without laughing, for he never expresses in his person the desire to be admired."\*\*

Later in 1841 Lucien won new praise for a *pas de trois* danced with Adèle and Sophie Dumilâtre in *La Reine de Chypre*. His success in *Giselle*, however, caused him to be selected as permanent partner for Carlotta Grisi, and henceforth he danced in each new ballet created for her at the Opera. They also studied together daily in the class of M. Barrez, a veteran who had been at the Paris Opera for twenty years. The lovely Carlotta was married at that time to Jules Perrot, a magnificent dancer who had the misfortune of being extremely ugly.

\* *Histoire de l'Art Dramatique en France*, Vol. I, p. 42.  
\*\* *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, July 4, 1841.

Théophile Gautier loved her with a deep and hopeless passion which endured throughout his lifetime. It was to Lucien Petipa, however, that Grisi gave her heart. The handsome dancer appealed to her more than any of the wealthy and distinguished suitors who besieged her. At one time it was whispered that Lucien and Carlotta were married, but the rumor proved false.

In *La Péri*, Carlotta Grisi was obliged to execute a dangerous and difficult leap, in which she fell from a high piece of scenery into the waiting arms of her partner. Only to Petipa, who danced Achmet, would she trust her life in the execution of this breath-taking tour de force. He accompanied her to London when she danced *La Péri* at Drury Lane. Later, he danced with her at the Paris Opera in *Le Diable à Quatre*, *Paquita*, *Griselidis*, and *La Filleule des Fées*.

As *premier danseur* at the Opera, he was cast for a leading role in almost every ballet presented there. In 1844 he appeared as Télémaque in *Eucharis*. Adele Dumilâtre danced the title role. Petipa danced *La Péri* with Adeline Plunkett on the occasion of her debut, March 31, 1845. Later he was the partner of Fanny Cerrito in *Orfa*, *Gemma*, and *La Favorite*. At almost every appearance the press heralded him as the finest male dancer at the Opera, but these eulogies manage to say very little about his actual style. He must have been a brilliant technician; it is certain that he was a deft and self-effacing partner, a clever mime, and a sincere artist.

"Besides Mlle. Priora, who plays the role of Blanche, and Mlle. Plunkett, who plays that of Vert-Vert," wrote Paul Smith after the première of *Vert-Vert*, "It is necessary to mention Petipa, who plays no role at all, but who dances a *pas de deux* with Mlle. Priora, and supports her very easily in the most difficult evolutions, like a man accustomed to render such services. If great *danseuses* are rare, how much more are great *danseurs*!"\*

He danced again with Priora in the première of the Mazilier-Potier-Cambon ballet, *Aelia et Mysis*, in 1853. In this tragic ballet Madame Guy-Stephan, the partner of Marius Petipa during his travels in Spain, appeared at the Paris Opera.

Lucien's fame was not confined to Paris. He had danced, as we have already noted, in London. In 1844 he appeared as guest artist at the Monnaie.

There he performed *Giselle*, *La Péri*, and *La Sylphide*. In 1845 he toured England, Ireland, and Scotland as the partner of Marie Taglioni. The great ballerina presented him with a magnificent diamond brooch, in testimony of her admiration for his performance in the ballet *La Fille de Marbre*. On December 26, 1849, he made his debut at La Scala, Milan, in Casati's ballet *Giovanni di Leida*. Casati was a composer as well as a choreographer, and often assisted in the preparation of the music for his ballets. On this occasion his collaborator was C. B. Croff. *Giovanni di Leida* had considerable success, and Lucien remained in Milan throughout the winter season.

When Carolina Rosati made her Paris Opera debut in *Jovita*, in 1853, Petipa played his first character role, that of a brigand chieftain. A similar part in the ballet *La Fonti* followed. Petipa had now attained the age of thirty-nine, and although he had not retired from the stage, he decided to turn his attention to choreography. His first effort was a *divertissement* for the Paris premiere of Verdi's opera *Les Vêpres Siciliennes*, presented June 13, 1855. "Let us not forget the *divertissement* of the *Four Seasons*, of which the composition, the tableaux, and the dances do honor to the inventive mind of Petipa . . ." wrote a critic in reviewing the opera.\*

When Amalia Ferraris danced *Les Elfes*, it was noted that Petipa, "the most distinguished of the princes and dukes of the Opera,"\*\* was Duke Albert.

In 1857 he composed a Spanish dance, *La Gaditana*, which was interpolated in Donizetti's opera *La Favorite*. The following year he attempted his first full-length ballet, *Sacountala*, with a libretto by Gautier and music by Ernest Reyer. The principal role was danced by Ferraris, and Petipa himself appeared as Douchmanta, King of India. "Petipa plays his role as king and choreographer with much dignity,"\*\*\* was the only comment vouchsafed by the critic of *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris* after the first performance. Petipa's choreography was probably clean-cut and workmanlike without being either brilliant or particularly original.

The great ballerina Marie Taglioni had retired from the stage in 1847. In 1859, however, she danced with Lucien Petipa at a private performance

\* *Ibid.*, 1853, p. 186.

\*\* *Ibid.*, 1856, p. 262.

\*\*\* *Ibid.*, 1858, p. 238.

\* *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 1851, p. 388.

given at the home of the composer Rossini. His soirées with their attendant buffets were famous, and invitations were much sought after in the musical and artistic circles of Paris. Sometimes Rossini himself would play the piano, or accompany the singer of the day in an aria from one of his operas. Adelina Patti was a frequent guest. On this occasion the two dancers presented a little ballet composed of a gavotte and the famous Tyrolienne from *William Tell*. Taglioni was fifty-five and Petipa forty-three.

Later in the same year Petipa danced with Taglioni's most talented pupil, the ill-fated Emma Livry, in Meyerbeer's opera *Le Prophète*. This young girl, who promised to equal her incomparable teacher, was burned to death during a rehearsal several years later, when she was twenty-one. It was Lucien Petipa who delivered the funeral oration at her grave.

In 1860 Petipa was appointed professor of the class of perfection at the Opera, replacing M. Gosselin, who had recently died. He composed his second ballet, *Grasiosa*, in the following year. The music was written by Theodore Labarre, the decors were by Cambon and Thierry, and the leading role was danced by Amalia Ferraris. The first performance took place on March 25, 1861.

Rehearsals for this ballet were interrupted by an assignment as difficult as it was unwelcome. On Lucien Petipa devolved the task of arranging the choreography of the Venusberg Bacchanale for the first Paris production of Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, already produced in Dresden in 1845.

The original version contained no ballet, but when Alphonse Royer, director of the Paris Opera, accepted *Tannhäuser* for production fifteen years later, he demanded that a ballet divertissement be inserted, according to the convention of the time, in the second act. Wagner refused point-blank, as the scene in the Hall of Song contained no appropriate place for a ballet. Royer pointed out that the most influential subscribers of the Opera, and especially the members of the notorious Jockey Club, came to the Opera chiefly to see the ballet, and since they always arrived late and left early, the ballet must be in the second act or as a compromise there must be a ballet divertissement between acts one and two. The dispute was quite public and arguments for and against the *Tannhäuser* ballet appeared in the daily papers. At one time Wagner even threatened to withdraw his opera, rather than submit to a change which he felt was a violation of



Lucien Petipa in *La Filleule des Fées* (Perrot-Adam). 1849

Lithograph by Alexander Lacauchie

artistic truth. Later, in his treatise *On Conducting*, he took great pains to explain his attitude, emphasizing the fact that he objected not to dancing itself (he included a ballet in *Rienzi*), but to the introduction of a superfluous divertissement which would serve no purpose in the development of the opera. He wrote:

I had declared that I could not possibly disturb the course of just this second act by a ballet, which must here be senseless from every point of view; while on the other hand I thought the first act, at the voluptuous court of Venus, would afford the most apposite occasion for a choreographic scene of amplest meaning, *since I myself had not deemed possible to dispense with dance in my first arrangement of that scene* (italics the author's). Indeed I was quite charmed with the idea of strengthening an undoubtedly weak point in my earlier score, and

I drafted an exhaustive plan for raising this scene in the Venusberg to one of great importance. . . Thus I myself was taken with a new liking for this earlier work of mine; I most carefully revised the score afresh, entirely rewrote the scene of Venus and the ballet-scene preceding it, and everywhere sought to bring the vocal parts into closest agreement with the translated text. . . ”\*

Although the first performance of *Tannhäuser* was tentatively scheduled for the last week in January, 1861, Wagner continued to put off the composition of the Bacchanale, and on December 15, 1860, it had not even been begun! The premiere was finally postponed until March 13th, but even so Petipa must have had very little time to prepare a ballet such as Wagner had visualized.\*\* At the same time, the choreographer was occupied with preparations for *Graziosa*, which he probably considered much more important than Wagner's first-act Bacchanale!

At any rate, Petipa's choreography came far from satisfying Wagner, who wrote later:

I explained to the ballet master what a ludicrous contrast the wretched little tripping *pas* of his Maenads and Bacchantes presented with my music, and begged him to devise something answering to the Bacchanalian groups on famous reliefs, something bold and sublime. The man whistled through his fingers, and said: "Oh, I quite understand, but it would need a corps of *premières danseuses*. Were I to tell my people a word of it, and ask them to strike the attitudes you mean, we should have the Can-can on the spot, and all be ruined. . . ”\*\*\*

Petipa's allusion to the *can-can* demonstrated that he knew the popular dance halls and theatres of the Boulevards, although he seldom if ever used contemporary social dances as material for his choreography. The placing of the ballet in the first act precluded the use of outstanding soloists, as they refused to appear if their audience was not there.

The Paris *Tannhäuser* was a complete fiasco, and was withdrawn after three performances. The critics,

prejudiced in advance, condemned it unanimously. P. J. Scudo, writing in the influential *Revue des Deux Mondes*, went as far as to say:

It is high time that the Parisian public arrested with one vigorous blow the pretensions of the author of *Tannhäuser*. Without ever having doubted the inanity of his efforts to change the tastes and the good sense of France, we hope that M. Wagner, his system and his work will be promptly judged and forgotten. . . \*

Since this was typical of the attitude of the time towards Wagner, one can hardly condemn Lucien Petipa for having failed to translate his music adequately into dance form.

The success of *Graziosa* helped Petipa to forget his part in the Wagnerian disaster, and a few weeks later he welcomed his brother Marius, who had just arrived with his wife on a visit from Russia. Lucien arranged for Marius's ballet *Le Marché des Innocents* to be presented at the Opera in May, and for this production Lucien assisted in the staging. In October of this eventful year, Lucien composed the dances for a revival of Gluck's *Alceste*.

The next work which he created was *Le Roi d'Yvetot*, presented December 28, 1865. A serious illness interrupted his work in 1868, and he was obliged to retire for some time. During the season of 1872-73 he directed the ballet and the school of dancing at the Monnaie, but he presented no ballets of his own. The two productions of the year were his brother's *Le Marché des Innocents* and a ballet by Lagye, with music by Hanssens, called *Les Fleurs Animées* (which seems to stem from Grandville's drawings and Didelot's *Flore et Zephyr*.)

Lucien Petipa's last choreographic composition was Edouard Lalo's *Namouna*. It was presented at the Paris Opera on March 6, 1882, with Rita Sangalli in the title role. Because of the "symphonic" character of the music it was not appreciated at its first performance. There were not enough set numbers to display the virtuosity of the soloists. Perhaps Lalo and Petipa had unconsciously adopted ideas crystalized in Wagner's music. Gradually *Namouna* became more popular, remaining in the repertoire for over forty years.

Lucien Petipa died in 1890, forgotten by all save a few of his associates. His fame had rested upon his own splendid abilities as a dancer, rather than on his achievements as a choreographer. He had upheld the honor of the male dancer in an age when he was the most neglected of artists; for this alone he may be remembered.

\* Richard Wagner: *Prose Works*, translated by William Ashton Ellis. Volume III, pp. 351-352.

\*\* Wagner's directions for the Venusberg scene are as follows: The stage represents the interior of the hill of Venus. In the furthest background, there is a bluish lake in which maidens are bathing, and on whose banks Sirens are reclining. Venus is extended on a couch in the left foreground. Tannhäuser's face is buried in her knees. The cave has a rosy hue. From the mounds on the side of the cave where tender couples are reclining come the nymphs who dance. . . A group of bacchantes dash thru the nymphs and stir them to frantic excitement. They are joined by Satyrs and faunes. The Graces and the cupids now take part in the orgy. . . At the height of the dance, a sudden lassitude spreads and a mist gathers in the cave leaving only Tannhäuser and Venus visible.

\*\*\* Richard Wagner: *Prose Works*, translated by William Ashton Ellis. Volume IV, pp. 342-343.

\* *Revue des Deux Mondes*, April 1, 1861, p. 769.

### III

Some thirty years ago, the Diaghilev Russian Ballet appeared in Paris for the first time, and made history. It is not so well remembered, however, that individual Russian dancers had been appearing in Paris at intervals throughout the nineteenth century. Marius Petipa went there himself in 1861, for the debut of his wife, the young and lovely Marie Petipa, at the Opéra.

Through the influence of his brother Lucien, Marius arranged for *Le Marché des Innocents* to be presented in the French capital. He had created the work in St. Petersburg, to Pugnî's score, where it was first given on April 23, 1859. The Paris première took place on May 29, two years later.

Although the new ballet was a decided success, the French criticisms devoted but little space to discussion of its choreography. Their attention was centered upon the charming prima ballerina, Marie Sergeyevna Surovshikova, professionally known by her married name as Marie Petipa.

Petipa was one of the first Russian ballerinas to venture outside her native country. In Paris she had been preceded by Nadejda Bogdanova, who had danced there from 1851 to 1855, and by Helene Andreyanova, who had appeared there in 1845. Marie Petipa, thanks to the careful tutelage of her husband, was able to surpass both of her predecessors and increase the prestige of the Russian ballet in Europe.

Marie Petipa was a fragile girl with delicate limbs and flexible, arrowlike pointes. Her figure differed greatly from that of the typical sturdy ballerina of the 'sixties. She was not strong enough to execute tours de force of great difficulty and brilliancy, but she had an instinctive flair for character dancing. In *Le Marché des Innocents* she danced an exotic solo called *La Ziganka*, as well as a Mazurka and a classic *pas de deux* with Mérante, called *Le Panier des Cerises*. At the first performance she was recalled after each of these dances, while the audience shouted and clapped its approval.

"Mme. Marie Petipa, although still quite young, is not making her first debut," wrote the critic of *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, "She has already gathered many bravos and crowns. She is slim of figure, with a slender body, alluringly svelte, a delicate leg, and she has *pointes* which she uses like little natural stilts, with an invariable and formidable precision. One would say (all play on words aside) that they are *pointes* of steel! The audience found her charming, and applauded her rapturously in the *Panier des Cerises*, a *pas* which she danced



Marie Petipa. Paris. 1861  
Harvard Theatre Collection

with Mérante and which ended with a graceful imitation of the prayer of Tantalus. It is necessary to see the supple ballerina bend and lower herself in trying to seize with an eager mouth the fruit which is on the ground and which always escapes her. . . ."

On July 12, 1861, she danced her role of Gloriette in *Le Marché des Innocents* on an historic occasion. It was the first time that a whole evening devoted to ballet was presented at the Paris Opera. The rest of the program consisted of *La Vivandière*, danced by Mlle. Zina Richard, who was also a Russian, and Lucien Petipa's ballet *Graziosa*, danced by Mlle. Amalia Ferraris.

At the command performance of *Le Marché des Innocents* for the Emperor of France and the King of Sweden, His Majesty Charles XV visited the *foyer de la danse* to congratulate the charming Russian ballerina. On the fol-

\* *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 1861, p. 169.

lowing evening a performance was given for her benefit. It was completely sold out in advance, and the receipts exceeded 16,000 francs. M. de Sabour-off, director of the Russian Imperial Theatres, was present, as well as the Princess Metternich, the French Minister of State, and numerous members of the Russian aristocracy. On this occasion Marie Petipa danced a new divertissement called *Pas Cosmopolite*, which had been arranged by Jules Perrot in Russia. Unfortunately its presentation in Paris had not been authorized by the choreographer, who promptly sued Marius Petipa for appropriating his composition. After a lawsuit which dragged on for nearly a year, Petipa was forced to pay Perrot 300 francs damages.

When Marius and Marie Petipa returned to Russia it was with greatly increased prestige. Glowing accounts of their Parisian triumphs preceded them to Petersburg. Their position in Russia was infinitely strengthened by their foreign conquests. It was during the following winter at the Maryinsky that Marius Petipa composed his first five-act ballet, *La Fille de Pharaon* (music by Pugni), which enjoyed a stunning success.

Marie Petipa returned to Paris in March, 1862. She made her reappearance on June 6 in *Le Marché des Innocents*, and was welcomed with the following enthusiastic notice: "Mme. Petipa has something in her which radiates joy and contentment, and communicates itself magnetically to the public. . . She is so happy to dance, she seems at the same time so penetrated by the pleasure which she causes, that one feels this influence immediately, and gives oneself up to it with infinite pleasure. . ."

On June 20th *Le Diable à Quatre*, which had been created for Carlotta Grisi in 1845, was revived for Marie Petipa. It was the occasion of the following eulogy:

" . . . The talent of Mme. Petipa is a talent all her own; one cannot make any comparison between her and the stars of the past or present. . . . She dances with her legs, with her arms, with her fingers, with her head; she leaps, she pirouettes, she waltzes on the *pointes* (and what *pointes*) for fully five minutes, and all this with a lightness, an aplomb, a happiness, a coquettishness, which charm, which seduce, which conquer. For two hours, such was the effect produced upon the public by Mme. Petipa, an effect which was translated into applause and bravos without end, and frequent recalls. But it was above all in the Mazurka that she ex-

ercized all her native seductions; we do not believe that this dance, so graceful and so original, has ever been danced in this manner in Paris. The partner of Mme. Petipa, Kchesinsky, dances like a child of Poland and proved himself accomplished; also the public called encore loudly, and even recalled the couple, who graciously began to dance again. Already, in *Le Marché des Innocents*, Mme. Petipa had given proof of the intelligence and spirit with which she mimes a role; one has been convinced by the scene of the mirror and by the dancing lesson that in this respect she has nothing to learn. It would be impossible to express better her new situation as a great lady, or more comically her impatience at the dancing lessons . . ."

The Kchesinsky mentioned in the review, who had accompanied Marie Petipa to Paris for the express purpose of dancing the Mazurka with her, was the father of the great Imperial ballerina Mathilda Kchesinskaia, friend of the last Czar, now wife of the Grand Duke. From her balcony V. I. Lenin announced the formation of the Soviet State.

Marie Petipa remained at the Paris Opera for the whole summer. On one occasion Kchesinsky was ill, and not wishing to omit the famous Mazurka she danced it alone, improvising some movements with great cleverness and ingenuity. Later she took part in a pension fund performance, appearing in *Le Diable à Quatre* and the divertissement from Halevy's *La Juive*.

In the autumn, after paying a flying visit to London and another to Germany, the family returned to St. Petersburg. There Marie made a triumphant reappearance in her husband's *La Fille de Pharaon*. Her magnificent work as the interpreter of his early ballets helped Marius Petipa enormously in establishing himself as the principal choreographer of the Russian school. After the withdrawal of Saint-Leon, in 1869, he was appointed chief maître de ballet. In that capacity he arranged *Raymonda*, *La Belle au Bois Dormant*, *Le Lac des Cygnes* and those other masterpieces that we still enjoy.

The health of Marie Petipa was too delicate to long withstand the strain of dancing. She retired from the stage in 1869, and died in Pyatigorsk, Northern Caucasia, in March, 1882. Meanwhile, on January 12, 1875, at the Maryinsky, beautiful eighteen-year-old Marie Mariusovna had made her debut in *The Blue Dahlia*, composed for her mother fifteen years before.

\* *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 1862, p. 189.

\* *La Revue et Gazette Musicale de Paris*, 1862, p. 201.